

## **SUMMARY**

### **Standard 1 – Watershed**

Due to the existing diversity and amount of vegetative cover on uplands, the existing condition of primarily ephemeral channels, the management responsibility to mitigate impacts from roads on hydrologic flow events and soil erosion, and the generally small number of management issues that need to be dealt with, it is determined that the Sage Creek watershed is meeting Standard #1.

Due to the existing diversity and amount of vegetative cover on uplands, the existing and improving trend in stream vegetation and channel morphology, and the small number of remaining management issues, it is determined that the remaining area within the Lower Platte watershed within the report area is meeting Standard #1.

### **Standard 2 – Riparian/Wetlands**

There has been improvement in riparian/wetland condition within the assessment area over the last 10 to 15 years, however, there are still some specific areas that need attention. Allotments containing riparian/wetland habitat that do not meet this standard have been described previously and include: Wolfe, Platte River, Middlewood Hill, Dana Ridge, Dana Meadows South, Sixteenmile allotments.

Most of the lentic and lotic sites not meeting the standard have been, or are in the process of being addressed in management plans or as range improvement projects. Continued progress in grazing management of livestock will ensure further improvement of all riparian areas within this area. Although there are areas where desired future condition is yet to be reached in woody species dominance and composition in the upper watersheds, these areas still meet the minimum standard of rangeland health. Other than the specific allotments listed previously, the remainder of the allotments within this assessment area are meeting Standard #2 – Riparian/Wetland.

### **Standard 3 – Uplands**

At the present, the review of upland vegetation conditions in the Lower Platte River watershed reveals generally good overall community health. Natural ecological and biological processes appear to be functioning adequately overall, although concerns about current, and especially near-future, functionality of certain community types remain. Specifically, the review group has determined that the majority of upland vegetation communities are properly functioning in relation to the seral stage to which they have evolved. Several specific communities, however, are threatened or elicit concerns due to their uniformity of age and structural class, and the imminent onset of over-maturity to decadence (big sagebrush, aspen, lodgepole pine and mountain shrub stands). Livestock grazing is a component in the management scenario of these plant communities, but it is not the principle factor in non-attainment of this Standard.

### **Standard 4 – Wildlife/Threatened and Endangered Species/Fisheries Habitat, Weeds**

Habitat needed to support healthy wildlife populations and listed or proposed threatened and endangered species is generally in acceptable condition. This does not mean that there aren't problems or concerns about wildlife habitat. The discussion under Standard #2 – Wetland/Riparian Health and Standard; #3 – Upland Plant Health; outlines the current conditions and recommendations for improving management of these resources. Although an area may meet a standard, it still may not be at our "desired or future" condition. On the other hand, our composition of native species is good, with some weed problems at this time. Due to the existing good condition of native vegetation and its ability to support the diverse wildlife

populations we currently have, it is determined that the majority of Lower Platte assessment area is meeting Standard #4 with respect to wildlife.

The improved management of riparian habitats through the use of grazing BMPs indicates both an upward trend and meeting Standard #4 for fisheries for some of the streams in the assessment area. However, many other sites that should support fisheries currently do not. Standard #4 for fisheries is not being met on streams, which currently fail Standard #2 – Riparian/Wetland. There are also sites that are rated in proper functioning condition, but due to the lack of overhead cover (stream shading) exceed temperature requirements for some fish species and won't support them. However, these sites have not yet been defined. Due to the lack of credible data on the status of native fishes in the watershed, whether Standard #4 is being met for these species is unknown.

Due to the existing good condition of native vegetation and the weed treatment program in place to control and/or eradicate identified weed problem areas, it is determined that the majority of the watershed is meeting Standard #4 with respect to weeds. There are known areas of noxious weeds that are rapidly expanding and are not being treated. These areas affect approximately 1000 acres. The following recommendations, in addition to following the Rawlins Weed Prevention Plan (BLM, 1999), would expand upon the success already achieved and help to meet desired resource conditions in the future.

#### **Standard 5 – Water Quality**

Sage Creek has a naturally high sediment load due to the highly erosive soils and arid climate in much of the watershed. It has been identified by several studies as the most significant contributor of Total Dissolved Solids (TDS) and/or Total Suspended Solids (TSS) to the Upper North Platte River and is on Table C of the 303(d) List, therefore it fails this standard according to the State of Wyoming.

In 1997 the Sage Creek Watershed 319 project began. This project is using a combination of short duration grazing, riparian and 47 2004 Public comment draft drift fencing, off channel water development, improved road management, grade control structures and water diversion and vegetation filtering to reduce sediment loading from Sage Creek to the North Platte, as well as improving water quality within Sage Creek.

Hugus and Iron Springs Draw drainages are Class 3B waters, with intermittent to ephemeral stream channels. Although historically impacted by past grazing practices, existing information and data indicate no significant water quality problems. Sugar Creek flows through Rawlins and enters the North Platte just upstream of Seminoe Reservoir. Some concerns with the physical condition of the watershed above Rawlins have been raised. Rawlins' waste water treatment plant discharges to Sugar Creek, but the stream rarely flows all the way to its confluence with the North Platte River.

#### **Standard 6 – Air Quality**

Within this assessment area there is no air quality criteria pollutant non-attainment areas for either state or federal standards as determined by the Wyoming DEQ. Due to prevailing winds, limited pollution within the general area, overall air quality meets this standard.

**Allotments described in this report that do not meet Standards due to Livestock Grazing:**

- Platte River: Standard #2 - Riparian/Wetland
- Pass Creek Ridge: Standard #2 – Riparian/Wetland
- Sixteenmile: Standard #2 – Riparian/Wetland
- Wolfe: Standard #2 – Riparian/Wetland
- Middlewood Hill: Standard #2 – Riparian /Wetland
- Dana Meadows South: Standard #2 – Riparian/Wetland

**Standards not being met due to causes other than livestock grazing:**

- Standard #1 - None
- Standard #2 - Wolfe: Irrigation Impacts on Riparian/Wetland
- Standard #3 - None
- Standard #4 - None, Streams on public land that do not meet Standard #2 and are capable of supporting fish populations on public lands; responsibility – BLM. Expansion of noxious weeds – BLM, BOR, private landowners, County Weed and Pest Districts.
- Standard #5 - None
- Standard #6 - None